

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We are grateful to the Senate leadership for your efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with the urgency that a once in a lifetime public health crisis demands. We urge you to ensure this pandemic relief bill addresses longstanding health care disparities exacerbated by the pandemic, including our nation's maternal health crisis. The House has included a provision to extend Medicaid coverage for new mothers from the current 60 days postpartum to 12-months postpartum in its budget reconciliation legislation for the next COVID-19 relief package. This policy is essential to addressing our nation's maternal mortality crisis – one that overwhelmingly impacts Black women, and we urge that the 12-months coverage extension remain in the final package.

This pandemic and our nation's maternal health crisis are not mutually exclusive. Data show that Black women die at a rate that is three times greater than white women as a result of childbirth – and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pregnant women are significantly more likely to be hospitalized, admitted to an intensive care unit, and receive mechanical ventilation than non-pregnant women. Additionally, COVID-19 mortality rates are substantially higher among Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations than among white or Asian American populations – and Latinx individuals have been impacted more than twice as much as any other ethnicity. These rates have revealed the long-standing inequities within our health care system and have exacerbated racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes.

Considering the heightened risks for pregnant persons during this pandemic and the existing racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes for people of color, Congress must act now – to prioritize one of our most vulnerable populations – and adopt the 12-month extension of postpartum coverage for birthing persons enrolled in Medicaid. Health experts across the nation have recommended providing postpartum Medicaid coverage for a full year. The Medicaid program is critical in addressing our nation's maternal mortality crisis as the program covers nearly half of all births in the United States. In 2018, Medicaid financed just over 40% of all US births, and in some states, provided coverage for more than 60% of births. According to the CDC, the majority of pregnancy-related deaths occur after delivery and nearly one quarter of maternal deaths occur more than six weeks postpartum.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the risks for mothers of color, and risks exacerbating the maternal mortality crisis. 12-months of continuous postpartum Medicaid eligibility would remove key barriers that often prevent mothers from getting the care they need after birth. As Congress finalizes the next COVID relief package, we strongly support the continued inclusion of the 12-month extension of postpartum Medicaid coverage— to help improve outcomes by expanding quality access to care. Recognizing the magnitude of this provision, as a first step in providing critical care for our most vulnerable populations, we also urge the Senate to prioritize a robust maternal health policy agenda moving forward.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Ben Ray Luján  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator